

Part 6: Why We Preach?

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If you could get one final word of advice from a person you consider to be of great influence in your life, what do you think that advice would be? We see moments like this in cinema and literature all of the time. When the old wise sage, or faithful mentor whispers in his dying breath, or counsels as he begins his own journey to the great beyond.

But what if you were not only to have that final moment of clarity and counsel with your specific individual, but what if that moment came when it seemed like everything in your own world, your own career and your own family was perhaps falling apart. How desirable would that counsel be and what would you want to experience in that moment?

Well, for Timothy, the young pastor of a first century church in the city of Ephesus, this was indeed his reality. Timothy was surrounded by cultural and political influences which seemed bigger and more attractive than the influence of the gospel, there was racial tension brooding in his own congregation, there were false teachers leading his church members into myths, fables, and cults, there was the nagging issue of his youth and inexperience and on top of all of that his mentor, his spiritual father, the Apostle Paul was in prison nearing his own death resulting in many of his own peers fleeing from ministry due to the difficulty of it.

In the book of 2 Timothy we have Paul's letter, his mentor moment, with his young protégé in a time when Timothy might have felt everything was going wrong.

Paul's charge to him is rooted in Timothy's experience of his own Christian walk and that is this: Timothy, when the world shakes, when fears rise, when pain ensues, when confusion clouds, preach the word.

The preaching of God's word was prescribed not only for Timothy's own endurance, but for the endurance of the church under Timothy's care. Paul's charge was for Timothy in the face of uncertainty to believe the word, preach the word, and trust the Lord.

For many of us this idea might be unpopular to you. Perhaps the idea of preaching from God's word seems a bit outdated—it is a book completed over two thousand years ago. For others the work of preaching might seem too academic, too theological, or too clumsy. But our presuppositions and experiences don't preclude the charge of preaching. In fact it's in the face of many of those same doubts and challenges in his own day that Paul calls Timothy to preach.

What we see in our passage today are really two perspectives. In our first seven verses Paul calls Timothy to look back and remember all the teaching that has kept him and endured him up until this point. Being so reminded of the power of God's word in his own life, Timothy is charged by Paul in the final five verses of our text to preach the word moving forward.

As we've been working through a series of why we do what we do as a church and how it influences the life of a believer, we are going to today answer "Why We Preach" and broadly we will find one answer: **We preach to get the word of God and the work of God in into the people of God for the joy of God.**

We are going to see this largely in three ways, first we will see that **Preaching and teaching Scripture is the foundation of the church**, then in chapter four verses 1-4 we will see **Preaching is what serves and sustains the church** and lastly in verse 5 we will see that **Preaching is what serves and saves the lost.**

When you think about preaching you might think of preaching in a pulpit sense. And while this public preaching was the center of God's early church, and the center of our text today, Paul starts not on the exclusive act of one specific act of preaching but on the broad ecosystem of teaching in various ways which shapes God's people.

This is our first point today: **Preaching and teaching scripture is the foundation of the church.**

Read with me **2 Timothy 3:10-17.**

In the midst of a painful season of Timothy's life, Paul reminds Timothy of what has served him so far. It's as if he seeks to say: "But look at what God has done to get you here!"

Have you ever realized that one of the most common responses we have when things become hard or difficult is to assume that something is wrong? Maybe you had a hard day at work and you wonder if you should be at a different job? Maybe it was a rough day of parenting and you wonder if you've been doing it all wrong?

What we see clearly in 2 Timothy is that the life of the Christian was becoming increasingly hard. Culture was making it difficult for believers to walk in holiness and obedience. The church was being made fun of for its silly teachings and imprisoned apostles. False teachers cut and pasted parts of the Bible to create a greatest hits Christianity which removed salvation in Jesus and calls for faithful living.

For Timothy, and for ourselves, when we encounter such hardship it's often easy to say: is good doctrine, holy living and sound theology the problem? Wouldn't it be easier if we could do something else? But this is where Paul interrupts his thought and says: Look at how that doctrine, that holiness, and that grace of scripture has endured you so far!

Paul first reminds Timothy of the community of teaching in which Timothy grew. He begins by pointing to his own teaching in verse 10.

You might have heard the common phrase, "Preach the gospel, use words if necessary." We do see in an important sense that Paul's ministry to Timothy includes a call to follow all of his life. Look back at verse 10. Timothy has followed Paul's conduct, his aim in life, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfastness, even his persecutions.

As Christians the whole of our lives are meant to leak gospel truth. In fact how many of us are unaware that the way we live is part of what we teach. But these postures and actions are subordinate to and reliant upon the first thing Paul shared with Timothy which was what: his teaching.

The words that Paul preached opened the floodgates for the life that Paul lived. Paul's teaching explained his life and his life explained his teaching. Paul knew evil deceivers offered Timothy something that was attractive, but here Paul says look at all I shared with you for your good!

It was not only Paul who shared good training with Timothy, look at **2 Timothy 3:14-15**.

Now I want to point out something important before I move on and that is that Paul calls Timothy not only to remember what he learned, but also what he firmly believed. There is a difference between learning about the Christian faith and believing in it. One requires simply the clenching of the mind, the other requires a surrender of the heart to the truth of Jesus Christ.

As we discuss preaching and teaching we must not be unaware that truths which pierce our mind but fail to be grasped by our heart are of little value. For some people this might be an immediate experience. I know one brother in our church who went to a church service a convinced non-Christian, heard the message of the gospel, and apart from any desire of his own, his heart was won over in full surrender to the message of the Jesus and believed the gospel and was saved.

But for others, this process of learning and believing happens over time in the context of the church. That's what Paul pointed to in the passage we just read. He wanted to remind Timothy "from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."

If you are reading in the ESV translation you'll notice a little footnote next to the word "whom" in this passage which reads: "The Greek for whom is plural." Meaning Paul wants Timothy not only to think of his own ministry role in his life but to think of all the people who helped teach him. He is perhaps referencing the two faithful women in Timothy's life that we learn of in **2 Timothy 1:5**.

In school, my daughter hatched chicks. They got a bunch of fertilized chicken eggs and they put them in an incubator. The incubator was a machine that kept the temperature and the humidity at just the perfect levels so that the baby chickens would grow and mature just as nature intended them.

The teaching of the gospel in the context of the church is the incubator which grows the Christian. This teaching includes preaching, it includes Bible studies, and one on one discipleship, and Bible memory with the kids in your community group, and sending Psalms to your brother or sister who is wrestling this week. And it is part of how God endures people like Timothy and people like you.

This is essential to the life of the church. Just as we saw earlier in Acts 2, the early church committed themselves to the teaching of the disciples. But why? Why do we care so much about passing along what Paul calls the sacred writings? Well firstly because it is precisely God's word which secures us.

Don't you see the wonderful power of God's word in this passage? Christians teach, because we've got something to teach. Look again at the central role God's word plays in the life of the believer: **2 Timothy 3:14-17**.

God's word is breathed out by God, it is profitable for many things. The root of all Christian teaching is the power of God's word. That's what Paul wants Timothy to see here. It's that as he learned God's word in different ways from different people, he encountered the breath of God which equips him and sustains him. We see in this first passage three ways in which God's word serves us as we grow in it.

First we see that God's word saves us from going from bad to worse. I'm not sure if you noticed, but one of the things Paul snuck into his list of things shared was persecutions. But he reminded Timothy that God delivered him from them! Right after he discusses persecution and deliverance in the Christian life he references in verse 13 false teachers going from bad to worse. The contrast Paul wants us to see is clear and that is that we should be more concerned of falling into false doctrine than we are of falling into persecution. All who suffer physically on account of scripture will ultimately be delivered and resurrected even in their death. But all who are deceived away from the truth of scripture only go from bad to worse! The teaching of scripture in the church reminds us of where safety is in God's word.

Scripture not only saves us from false doctrine, but scripture saves us eternally by giving us the knowledge we need about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Nature is wonderful, nature reveals aspects of God, but nature doesn't show us how Jesus has come to save us from our sin by dying in our place and giving life for all who believe in him. Only scripture tells us this. We need scriptural teaching because it's in the word of God where the work of God gets pressed into our hearts by faith.

But thirdly scripture not only saves us, it equips us. Speaking here to a shaken Timothy, Paul says the powerful God breathed word of Scripture will give you everything you need to live life in faithful enduring obedience.

What might it look like for you to participate in this teaching in our own church? Part of Timothy's comfort was looking back and seeing the safety of God's word administered through people who faithfully loved and invested in him. How might you be encouraged by examining how others have done that to you, and how might you look to advance that same comfort to others?

It's in light of this community of teaching the power of God's word that Paul now turns from reminding Timothy to charging Timothy in his own ministry.

We read this rousing call in **2 Timothy 4:1-4**.

Here we see our second point this morning: **Preaching serves and sustains the church**. Here Paul narrows the field of teaching by using a different word than he did in 3:10 and that word is: preach. This command to preach came with a weighty imperative.

Paul opens this command by saying, "I charge you." That word has a legal tone, it's as if he's in a court room testifying to the law under which Timothy stands indebted. The charge is not from Paul, Paul testifies in the presence of God himself, and of Jesus Christ. This charge bears all the power and certainty of the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

This is important for us to see because the call for Timothy to preach did not come from Paul's pragmatic idea of what might help the church grow. It came from the divine will of the Triune God because it's what the church needed and what God has given to the church.

When God's Old Testament prophets called Israel back, he charged them to preach against the idolatrous nation in Ezekiel 20 and 21.

Look at the language Jesus used when he defined his own ministry in **Luke 4:43**.

The ministry which Jesus himself undertook was the ministry he gave to the apostles in the early church. Look at Peter's words in **Acts 10:42**.

Preaching was not only what Jesus did while he was on earth. It's not only what he taught his apostles to do in the first church. But here, Paul an apostle and preacher himself sets a pattern for the historic church to preach the word.

So what is preaching and why is it so central? It's not simply that Christians tend to be hot winded intellectuals. It's because the nature of the message which saves us demands not only teaching, but preaching.

While all preaching teaches, not all teaching is preaching. Paul makes this really clear by using two different Greek words even in this passage. The gospel writers draw this distinction with the same two words saying that Jesus went about teaching and preaching. Paul told Timothy in his first letter that while all elders are called to be able to teach there are some elders who are particularly set apart to teach and to preach.

There are two words in Greek which are translated in the ESV as preaching, and another one which is translated as "proclaim." When we take the three of these together we get a sense of what preaching is and why it is so important.

The first word, "to proclaim," was a word which implied a public proclamation. It was not a private event, but a public one.

The word for preaching Paul uses here comes from the Greek word, "to herald." The most apt illustration of this are movies or literature in the medieval era in which a herald would go before, or in place of a King and declare the message of the king. Preaching is the heralding of a message under the authority of a king. It comes not as a discussion or as a suggestion, but as a message from the king.

But the other word for preaching defines the content of the herald's message. This is the word which is translated as "preach good news." We ran into this word already in Luke 2:10 when the angel says to the shepherds: "Fear not for I bring you good news." This word literally means, to declare good news, to gospel.

So if we want to understand what preaching is it is something generally done publicly, under the burden of divine authority as a herald, and it heralds not any news, but the wonderful good news of grace and change in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This preaching is established as the center point of Timothy's own ministry and has been the center point for faithful churches throughout the centuries. We preach because God has called us to preach.

But he has also told us what to preach. Preach the word.

What is preached in biblical churches is not up for debate. If preaching really serves the church with the same significance the Bible assumes it does, then we must know what we are to preach. I might be able to come in and passionately herald what the Titans should do this offseason. But this would not be faithful to Jesus' command.

I could preach about how our world is growing increasingly secular and how we should vote in light of that, or I can preach on the theological contributions of orthodox theologians. But even that is not what Paul here is referencing. I can get up and tell you that you should be loving and kind to those around you. But even that is not what Paul is after.

All of those things might show up in a sermon but the heart of any sermon which is meant to serve the church is a sermon which preaches the word.

What is the word? It is the whole of scripture which Paul just referenced. It is what Paul warned Timothy to engage with rightly in **2 Timothy 2:15**.

Why do we need God's word to be preached to us? Because God's word never changes. Look at how Peter puts this in **1 Peter 1:23-25**.

God's word remains forever. What a comfort this should be to us in our anxious world.

Our constant connection to news wants us to fear what is coming and panic as to how we will grapple with it. We might wonder how we are going to fix these issues, how we are to endure, or even how we as Christians are to respond.

But look at what Paul assumes in this text we just saw: **2 Timothy 4:3-4**. And look at what he says in **2 Timothy 3:1-4**.

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's saying, Timothy, this world is going to get weird. There's going to be lots of chaos, there's going to be disorienting events, there's going to be persecution, there's going to be competing voices, sin is going to be called good and good is going to be called sin, there's going to be pain and heartache and political turmoil so I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus: Preach the word.

Why is this important? Because even though to human eyes it might seem that the word of God is calling up something that lives behind us, because this word is breathed out by God, it is also what goes ahead of us.

We don't ever need to worry about God's word becoming irrelevant to the issues of our day because we have not outgrown the wound of sin in the human heart.

We need to be preached to because we don't know what we need. But God's word does. It knows that it is the declaration of the word of God which sometimes rebukes fools, sometimes offends sinners, but also exhorts and encourages the weak which ultimately gets the work of God kick-started in the Christian.

To be honest I have no idea what Missoula will look like in five years, let alone fifty, but what I do know is that God's word will prepare us for it by drawing us deeper and deeper in to faith and obedience to Jesus.

Preaching theologically sound sermons from the word of God gives us guardrails that keep us from wandering the path from bad to worse. It keeps us from walking away from the gospel.

In the building of the church, the preaching of God's word when rightly handled, is the hammer which drives the nail of the wonderful word and work of God into the structure. It applies force at different levels and in different ways to get God's redemptive news of Jesus Christ into the joints and grooves of the whole structure. But the wonder of preaching is not the preacher. The power of preaching is not the sermon any more than it is a hammer which holds together the house.

It is the nail which remains. It is the nail of God's word which serves and saves the church for all eternity. We might be built by the sermon but we are a people shaped by the word. One day the hammer will be set aside and what will remain is God's people who have been incredibly crafted by the power of the gospel. That is the hope in uncertain times.

Preaching is for the church. It is why Paul says to the Roman body of believers: **Romans 1:15**. Paul is eager to preach to believers, so we as believers need to be preached to.

If you are a believer in here today, you need, I need, God's word declared to me weekly. If you are not a believer in here today, this word is also for you. Preaching is essential to the believer, but preaching is also essential to the saving of the lost. Look at **2 Timothy 4:5**.

Part of Timothy's ministry, in submission to his call to preach the word, is the work of an evangelist.

Preaching serves the church by calling it more and more to the word and work of Jesus which is why our final point today is **Preaching is what serves and saves the lost**.

Pulpit preaching is part of God's great plan for the lost to hear the good news of the gospel.

Because at the heart of all biblical preaching is the announcement of good news, it means that though it at times rebukes and exhorts, it all times calls all people everywhere to the work of Jesus to save us from our sins.

It might seem like bringing your friend to church might be the last thing you want to do in your attempts to share the gospel with them, but it's our goal as the elders here at Sovereign Hope that in every sermon we ever preach you hear the good news of the gospel. That is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. It is the good news of the gospel that makes the bad news of your sin part of the incredible story of Jesus love for you.

It is he who reconciles us by taking our sinful punishment in our place and dying on a cross. This is good news, but it is not simply news. It is a call from a King that demands your response. It calls you to repent and to come into the kingdom of this king, to experience his love and his joy by submitting the whole of our life to him.

This message of the gospel is not only what saves you, but it is what sustains you for all of life. It is this teaching and the firm belief in it that brings Timothy joy in joyless times, brings him hope when all else seems to be failing and if you are here today would you hear in this message is hope for you as well.

But brothers and sisters, while pulpit preaching by faithful men set apart in the church is an essential sphere of preaching, it is not the exclusive place for it.

You as you leave here today are called to preach the gospel to those who are perishing.

When Paul was dialoguing with some acutely philosophical men in a public park in Athens he began to proclaim to them this message: **Acts 17:22-27**.

When the early church in Acts was scattered by the threat of persecution what did ordinary Christians do in their new contexts? **Acts 8:4**.

What did Jesus commission his disciples to do as his own parting word? **Matthew 28:18-20**.

Through preaching, through teaching, through training, coffee dates and conversations over the fence we are called to preach Christ and him crucified.

As we call people to the message of Jesus and his grace, what we call them to through faith, repentance, and often a life of difficulty is nothing less than the joy of God himself. Look at how Paul concludes his letter to Timothy. **2 Timothy 4:6-8**.

Brothers and sisters I want you to see this in the strong words of the weak and afflicted Paul, anyone who loves Jesus and waits for his coming by faith, there is a crown of rest and of righteousness.

What we preach is nothing short of ultimate joy and real hope in a world where our hearts are prone to run to sin, and our flesh is often weak in affliction. But here, here is hope in godliness, and rest in Jesus.

So dear church, as we put ourselves to the task of being preached to and of preaching to others: Fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith.